Tips for an Effective Job Search

…including Tips on Networking, Resume Writing,
Cover Letter Writing and Interviewing

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Foreword

Looking for a new job can either seem like a depressing chore – or an exciting and rewarding prospect!

The good news is that the right job is out there for everyone – if you know where and how to look.

The work environment of today is more open than ever before! Opportunities can be found through social media and online job boards, and through old-fashioned face-to-face contact.

At WorkAlpha, our goal is to help people find work so that they can improve their circumstances and live a more meaningful life.

WorkAlpha has compiled a treasure trove of tips on how to uncover wonderful job prospects and put your best foot forward. We have solicited career advice from a host of experts sharing their best practices in the areas of networking, resume writing, cover letter writing and interviewing.

What are you waiting for?! Your next best job is out there waiting for you! Read on for more information on how to make the most of your job search and visit us often for more job search advice.

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WorkAlpha's Top 10 Job Search Tips

By Alex Freund, Career Coach and Interview Expert

These job search tips should be understood as recommendations. Please also keep in mind that job search by someone who is employed differs significantly from job search by someone who is unemployed. The latter, typically, is more motivated, can devote more time to the job search, and does not need to be covert about his actions. This article focuses primarily on job seekers who are currently unemployed.

1) Know Yourself

Don't jump on the job search bandwagon before you know where you're heading. Look at the job search like a journey. Where do you want this journey to take you? To another dead-end job or to a job that will fulfill you?

The first step in the job search process is to reflect on the person that you are and the person that you would like to become. In what kind of environment do you thrive? What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses? What motivates you? Where do you want to be in five years?

Reach higher. If in your mind you don't aim higher, you will never be where you want to be.

2) Be Focused on What You Are Looking For

When looking for a job, you should think like a shopper and not like a victim. A smart car buyer, even before walking into the car dealership, knows what car he wants, including the model, the specifications, the color, and the amount he wants to spend. Similarly, a job seeker should narrow down choices not only by title but also by what the job function entails. A job seeker can look for more than one specific job at the same time but still remain specific.

By knowing what you want, you will empower yourself.

3) Take Care of Yourself

Finding the right job in today's job market is not only challenging but may also take longer than expected. Not having a source of income can be hard on you from many standpoints. Don't isolate yourself. Go out, volunteer, learn new skills

– do what you have to do to keep your spirits up and stay motivated. How can you project a positive image when you are feeling down?

4) Continuously Build Relationships

Sixty to 80 percent of people get their jobs through networking. The practical side of networking consists of developing relationships with people for advice, information, leads, and, hopefully, referrals. The best networkers think of the other person first. They don't keep score regarding who owes whom, and they believe that good deeds will be reciprocated.

Most people don't like to network. It can be intimidating asking for help. The trick is not to look at networking as asking for help. Look at networking as getting to know the other person. As you get to know the other person, the other person gets to know you and so on. Don't be afraid to engage others.

5) Leverage Social Media

Today's job seekers who avoid opportunities to use social media are less competitive. Employers use social media to find potential employees. Therefore, this new medium should be embraced. LinkedIn is the tool most widely used by recruiters, but Twitter, Facebook and Google+ also provide good opportunities. While using social media is a good thing, make sure to keep the content that you post online professional. If you have photos, posts or tweets that are inadequate, remove them.

6) Utilize Your Time and Energy Effectively

Many job seekers become frustrated very quickly into the process because they have no road map to follow. They keep active, driven by nervous energy, but almost all the time come up empty-handed because their process is inefficient. It works best to divide time and activities into three parts: one-third should be devoted to networking and building relationships; another third, to searching and applying for jobs; and another third, to learning about target companies and the companies' specific needs, including culture and fit.

Looking for a job is a full-time commitment. Because nobody will be looking over your shoulders, you have to be more disciplined. Do what needs to be done. Don't let your mind trick you into wishful thinking.

7) Develop Good Administrative Skills and Use the Right Job Search Tools

During a prolonged job search, one needs to keep good records in order to stay on top of things. Sloppy record keeping during the transition leads to further frustrations and inefficiencies. Leverage technology to your advantage. For example, use Indeed, LinkUp, and Simply Hired to access targeted leads.

8) Make Sure You Have a Top-Notch Resume and Cover Letter

It is critically important that your resume and cover letter promote you in the best light possible. If you submit a poorly-written resume, you may miss opportunities that would have opened-up to you and unduly lengthen your job search. One of the most painful mistakes the majority of job seekers make is to write their own résumés—even if those résumés have been edited by a trusted friend. Writing résumés nowadays needs not only the technical know-how to embed the right keywords in a résumé but also the talent to make the document exceptionally good.

Regarding the cover letter, don't dismiss it too soon. If well-written, it can make the difference between landing an interview or not, even if your resume is otherwise weak.

9) Practice Mock Interviewing

How good is it to be invited for an interview but not ace it? Don't rely on your past practices for getting a job. Today's job market is more competitive than ever, and without practicing interviewing, one has virtually no chance to compete.

10) Follow Up and Be Persistent

A salesperson makes seven calls before finalizing a sale. Kids go to the other parent when they hear the word no. If you're not offered the job, try to find out what went wrong, and fix it. Rejection is part of the job search process. Don't let it get to you. Instead, learn from each experience. To paraphrase Einstein, don't perpetuate your failures by expecting different results without making changes.

WorkAlpha's Top 10 Networking Tips

By Cathie Ericson, Writer and Public Relations Expert

Networking…ugh, why does the very term sound like so much WORK? And if you're actively job searching it can seem even more daunting. Of course, in today's fluid work environment, we are all "job hunting" to some extent so networking should never stop. But, for job searchers it looms even larger.

Here are the Top 10 Tips for making networking work for YOU!

1) Change Your Mindset

Networking doesn't have to be scary. Or hard. Or a waste of time.

Because it's really just a fancy business jargon-y word for "getting to know someone." And who doesn't want to do that? Now doesn't that make it sound more fun?

2) Take That New Mindset to Help You Network Everywhere

"Networking" no longer means a chamber of commerce meeting, a business mingle-y lunch or some other contrived setting. I mean, those are tried and true places to meet professionals and I recommend taking advantage of any opportunity that presents itself. But now it is so much easier because there are so many more choices for finding like-minded professionals, meaning that you can customize to the scenario that makes you feel most comfortable.

That might be joining a group on LinkedIn, chatting with parents at a school function, meeting other solo-preneurs at a coffee shop or volunteering for a political campaign.

3) Say "Yes"

Have you seen Jim Carrey's movie "Yes Man?" It is a goofy illustration of how great things can happen to people who say yes, opening them up to opportunities. Did another job hunter ask you to lunch? Boy, what a waste of time and a $6 sandwich. But is it? Maybe they have sources you don't, or know of a job that would be perfect for you.

Did someone invite you to volunteer with their organization? The last thing you need to do is work for free, right? Of course not! Volunteering is an excellent way

to build your skills in a supportive environment, while -- of course -- meeting people! Be judicious of course, and try to find opportunities that match your interests but for the most part saying yes puts you in the path of opportunity.

4) Put Your Best Foot Forward, Figuratively and Literally

It goes without saying that you want to project a professional demeanor. That doesn't mean you have to dress like a Wall Street banker on the sidelines of a soccer game, but it means that you should try not to look shlumpy no matter where you go. And it's more than dress -- it's taking care of yourself through grooming and exercise. It's making sure that you portray a positive attitude -- even if you're not feeling it. Find a trusted confidante with whom you can wallow and keep your chin up with everyone else.

And of course, spruce up our online presence. In today's society that is where potential employers will check you out first. Make sure your profiles include a professional photo. Keep active on your LinkedIn and Twitter accounts by commenting on other people's news, sharing articles of interest and otherwise making it clear you are engaged.

5) Have a Brief "Elevator Speech" Ready

That's a bit of a trite expression, but it refers to having a 30-second spiel ready for when someone asks about you. Are you job hunting? If the conversation naturally turns to your job hunt, have a quick sound bite prepared as to why you left your previous job and what you are looking for. Were you downsized? No shame in that these days....lots of sympathy and "welcome to the club." Be ready with a succinct statement about what happened... "my whole department was let go, but I took it as a sign to jump into another line of work so I am currently considering the healthcare industry" gives your listener enough to know about what happened...but more importantly...where you are headed!

6) Being Interested Makes You Interesting

We all know that people love to talk about themselves. Boy do they! But that can be an amazing advantage if you are not a master of small talk. Rather than relying on the tried and true -- and boring -- topic of weather, engage the person you're talking to with a question that will get them going. Don't make the first question -- ever -- "What do you do?" Too transparent.

Try: "How did you become involved with this group?" "What are your summer plans?" "What did you think of the speaker (or other topical reference)?" Even "What's new?" Really listen to the answers and ask pertinent follow-up questions. It doesn't mean you are stuck talking to one person all morning or evening (it's

just as useful to know how to make a gracious exit); but if you've let someone discuss their favorite topic -- themselves -- they are going to remember YOU as a brilliant conversationalist!

7) Follow Up With Those You Meet

The vast majority of people meet someone and think, "Wow, what an interesting person!" and then they file away the conversation or the business card and that's that. To stick out in someone's mind, follow up with them subtly...and very soon after you met.

Say you meet another mom at a soccer game and she works at a company that interests you. The next day (or two) follow up with a brief touch base. "Hi Jamie; I'm Scott's mom. We met at the soccer tournament. I am (new in the community, just meeting people, whatever would accurately describe your situation) and I was wondering if you might have time for a quick coffee some morning -- or even during soccer practice. Let me know if there's a day that works best."

Notice how subtle that was? You didn't mention jobs or companies or needing a favour. You were just being friendly with a mom you met at soccer. If the coffee/soccer date ends up being made and you talk about your job situation, that's the time to ask her about her job or company. (See Tip 8.)

Of course, you will use the same technique for people you meet in a business setting but that is much easier. Those people are expecting you to touch base with them. So don't delay...reach out and try to take your professional relationship to the next level.

8) Don't Put People on the Spot

If you are able to advance the relationship and have a meeting with someone, don't ask them for a job or if they know if the company is hiring. You can let them know you are interested without coming right out and putting someone in an awkward position.

For example, if you have a meeting with someone, treat it as an "informational interview." Going back to Tip 6, talk about them: ask them how they got into the business and how they like their current job. If you are considering an industry change, ask them more about what they do on a day-to-day basis or if they have any advice on what skills and qualities are important for someone entering the field.

9) Stay in Touch

Whether you have a meeting or not, stay in touch with those with whom you've connected. This can be as simple as following them on Twitter and retweeting a great post. Or sending them an article that you think might interest them, or a contact that might benefit them. Find them on LinkedIn. Engage them with information that will likely be of interest to them. But remember, the key to keeping in touch is not too much, not too often.

Was your contact largely based on your job search? Then it’s common courtesy to keep those in your network informed when you get a new job. Once that business card is ready, send a hand-written thank you note to anyone who helped or thought about helping you, announcing your great news and thanking them for their support. Now that they know where you are, who knows what other further business relationships might be forged? They could turn into trusted clients, vendors -- or colleagues. It’s a simple step that very few people take -- and it will be noticed.

10) Return the Favor

Yep if you have a job, people are going to be knocking on your door. Remember what that was like. Even though you can't possibly think of one way you can help them, or one source you can introduce them to, consider that maybe they are setting self goals for setting x number of meetings. Be one of them. You never know what might transpire. (Back to No. 3, "Say yes!")

Just as you remember who helped you -- or was kind or supportive -- when you were job hunting, so will they. Karma and all...

They say that luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity – and that is a pretty apt description of networking as well!

WorkAlpha's Top 10 Resume Tips

By Megan Koehler, Expert Resume Writer and Personal Branding Strategist

Are you writing your resume? Are you overwhelmed by the amount of information out there? Look no further for the top tips on creating a resume that will 'WOW' hiring managers and position you as the top candidate.

1) Start at the Top

Your name and contact information should be listed first; include a phone number, and email. Follow that with a specific and focused title geared towards the job you are applying to. Next you should incorporate a summary that highlights your value by showing potential employers what you can do for them. Keep your voicemail greeting professional and use an email address that consists of your name or some variation. It's not a bad idea to set up an email account specifically for your job search. Don't forget to include your LinkedIn profile address as well.

2) Incorporate Your Personal Brand

Your brand will set you apart from everyone else by capturing the qualities that are unique to you. A resume that showcases your personal brand will be a much more effective tool in your job search than a resume that simply states your qualifications. You can identify your brand by taking a look at your personality, your passions, your beliefs, how others perceive you, how you respond to different situations, your goals, and how all of this shapes the person that you are.

3) Focus, Focus, Focus

You want your resume to be as focused as possible on the position you are applying for. If all of your previous positions support the desired position then there's no problem. But if your career history is all over the place you will need to extract the transferrable skills from each position in order to focus your resume. That means finding the skills you've performed in the past that are relevant to the new position and highlight those to show how you would apply them.

4) Customize Your Resume for Every Position

This doesn't mean you have to completely overhaul your resume each time you send it out, but you should make small tweaks to align it with the specifics of the position. You should change your title, keywords, and experience as needed. If a position calls for a particular skill make sure you are highlighting your experience in that area.

5) It Has to Look Good

While the content of your resume is the most important element, the visual appeal of your resume is a close second. You don't want your reader to have to search for the information they need; a well laid out resume makes reading it a lot easier. Choose a font and size that is easy to read and margins that leave enough white space. Don't try and cram your resume onto one page if two pages would be more appropriate; but at the same time don't submit an overly long resume with irrelevant or outdated information.

6) Highlight Your Achievements

Too often resumes consist of boring bullet points that do nothing more than state the tasks you've performed. If you want to stand out to potential employers you need to show your value by emphasizing what you achieved in your previous positions. Sure, as a customer sales rep you answered customer calls and solved problems; but so what! Your resume will be a lot stronger if you highlight the fact that you had the highest rate of answered calls with the shortest amount of customer wait time.

7) Choose Your Words Wisely

Stay away from overused words such as: responsible for, problem solver, detail oriented, organized, or hard working. You should incorporate action words into your resume. Words that show what you did will be a much more effective tool than the worn out words seen on every other resume. When you write about your past career experiences place the verb at the beginning of each statement. Try some fresh verbs like: revitalized, secured, redesigned, eliminated, or accelerated.

8) Don't Be Afraid of Enhancements

Try using color on your resume. A little color on your resume can make a big impact. I'm not saying your entire resume should be printed in orange but simple uses of color can bring a whole new look to your resume.

For instance, consider using color for your name, section lines, or headings. Another way to enhance your resume is to make use of bold, underline, and italics. Those subtle enhancements can completely change the look of your resume and can draw attention to the most important parts of your resume.

9) Format is Extremely Important

The most popular format is the chronological format which goes in order of most recent to earliest jobs. Job seekers like it because it's easy, hiring managers like it because it's predictable and they know where to look for things. The functional format is a format that has gotten a negative association attached to it. In this format you place the importance on your experiences and achievements and not the actual jobs that you held. For this reason, out of work jobseekers, job hoppers, and those with anything to hide would tend to gravitate to this format. Personally, I like this format; but because of its reputation I tend to lean more towards a chronological/functional hybrid. It showcases your value right away but also presents a clear picture of your career history.

10) Be Prepared

Usually a job presents itself and then we get down to writing a resume for that job. However, it should actually be reversed. Your resume should be ready to go whenever you need it so that when an opportunity arises you don't have to waste time writing it. My recommendation is to create a master resume that includes every job you've held, every task you've performed, every class or training you attended, and every degree or certification you hold. Obviously you won't include all of this on your resume but you will be able to cut and paste the relevant information when creating your resume. This will be a huge time saver and will help you remember the details of your previous positions.

WorkAlpha's Top 10 Cover Letter Tips

By Megan Koehler, Expert Resume Writer and Personal Branding Strategist

You finally finished writing your resume and, what?! Now you have to write a cover letter too? To make that job a little easier here is a list of ten tips for writing your cover letter.

1) Cover Letters are a Must

You must send a cover letter. It is not optional. Sending a resume without a cover letter lacks professionalism and will not project a very good image.

2) Format Matters

The format of your cover letter should match that of your resume. Why? Because it looks good. Same font, same size, same margins, and same contact heading.

3) Using the Same Cover Letter Won't Cut It

Customize your cover letter for every position. Generic cover letters are boring and ineffective and will not get you anywhere. It might take you a little bit longer to write a cover letter for each position but it will be worth it. Mention the company by name, the hiring manager, and specifics of why you would be ideal for the position. Define your value by offering a solution for a need of that particular company.

4) To Whom it May Concern = WRONG!

Address your cover letter to someone specific. To whom it may concern or Dear Hiring Manager should be avoided if at all possible. Not sure who to send it to? Call the company, check out their website, or ask someone you know who works there. Your resume stands a better chance of getting to the person who needs to see it if it has someone's name on it.

5) Don't Strike the Wrong Tone

Pay attention to the tone of your cover letter. You want the tone to come across as confident and self-assured (not arrogant). Believe in yourself and your expertise and that will carry through to your reader. Don't say, I think my skills

would be a good match, or I hope to hear from you. Instead, say, My skills are directly in line with your needs, or I will be in touch.

6) Don't Just Tell, Sell Yourself

Be specific in promoting your value. Don't just tell them you are a good match show them exactly why you are. Give examples that highlight your value: In my past position I was able to reduce costs 43% by identifying ordering redundancies. As your inventory manager I would implement the same processes to eliminate repeat spending.

7) Let Me Explain…

Your cover letter is where you should address your plans to relocate (especially if your are applying for a job in a different area), any reasons for a career transition, and explain gaps in your career history.

8) Don't Repeat Yourself

Try and offer some new information that can't be found on your resume. Perhaps you had some great achievements earlier in your career that you didn't include on your resume, work them into your cover letter.

9) Grab Their Attention

Hook your reader in with an opening statement that is original and uncommon. This will grab your reader's attention and persuade them to keep reading. So many people use, Please consider me for, or I am submitting my resume in response. Both are boring and overused! Try something different to stand out from everyone else.

10) Close Your Letter With a Plan

End your cover letter with a plan. Be assertive and close with the action you will take such as, I will call your office next week to inquire about a time to meet and further discuss my qualifications. Don't waste weeks waiting for them to call you.

WorkAlpha's Top 10 Interview Tips

By Alex Freund, Career Coach and Interview Expert

Congratulations! You and just a few others have been selected from among many, many applicants to be called in for the second part of a selection process known as the job interview. The process is tortuous because all of those selected are outstanding applicants who, potentially, could do the job well. So, what should you do to outshine your competition in this contest? Here are 10 tips to follow.

1) Make the Best Impression

Based on the theories of Albert Mehrabian, UCLA professor emeritus of psychology, the interviewer judges a candidate 55% on visual appearance, 38% on voice, and 7% on words. The hiring decision is made on the impression the candidate leaves behind, and it's based primarily on the interviewer's gut feeling. Unfortunately, such decision making is certainly not science.

2) Present Facts—Not Your Opinion

The interviewer knows the candidate is there to sell himself. But the interviewer is not ready to buy everything the candidate wants to sell, except when the candidate recites facts, gives evidence about career background and ability to do the job, and uses adjectives or other kinds of self-descriptions if they're in sentences that begin in the third person—that is, when the otherwise self-descriptions were actually given by others.

3) Practice Mock Interviewing

Interviewing is like dancing: it can't be learned from a book—only by practice. The more one practices, the better one becomes. Additionally, practicing builds confidence, a trait picked up instantly by the interviewer.

4) Understand the Interviewer

Interviews are counterintuitive. In other words, they're not about the candidate; they're about the candidate's skills and experience in terms of their ability to solve the interviewer's problems. The interviewer is listening, but his hearing is selective: that is, when the candidate talks about himself, the interviewer barely hears it; when the candidate talks about how he can solve the company's

problems, the interviewer becomes more interested and attentive and is thinking, “Louder, louder!”

5) Be Ready to Recite Success Stories

To be most credible in a job interview situation, the candidate has to provide facts via success stories from past jobs. Say often the words for example, and then describe briefly a situation and the actions you took, ending with a description of the results and the benefits to your team or employer. Every time you provide an interview answer, ask yourself “so what?” This will force you to recall and recount pertinent and meaningful examples.

6) Dress to Impress

The first impression is crucial. The first judgment an interviewer makes is based on your looks and what you’re wearing. Appropriate attire for a job interview is a must. Men should wear an outfit that is professional, stylish, and tasteful. Women should look professional, fashionable, and polished. Regardless of the type of job applied for, though, clothing must look neat and tidy.

7) Avoid Interview Mistakes

First, don’t be late, because it not only suggests poor time management skills but also shows lack of respect for the interviewer. Second, don’t get caught being unfamiliar with the company; that shows lack of interest. Next, be fluid in reciting your background, including your success stories. And don’t talk too much: there’s not much worse you can do than to go on and on and on. Keep your answers to the point and focused; don't ramble.

8) Thank the Interviewer

Sending a timely thank you note to those who interviewed you is part of proper business etiquette. Even more, it’s your opportunity to reiterate and reinforce your interest in the position and to address any issues and concerns that came up during the interview. Don’t underestimate the power of a thank you note in swaying a person’s impression.

9) Participate and Don’t Feel Like a Victim

Certainly, it's important to listen to the interviewer, to pay attention, and to compose an appropriate answer to each question. But also be ready to engage the interviewer in turn, because the interview should be a dialogue that begins to

build a relationship rather than consisting only of your responses to questions. So, be prepared to ask the interviewer your own questions that you've prepared in advance.

10) Benefit from Your Contacts

Finding someone inside the company can be very helpful to reveal relevant information and idiosyncrasies. Sleuthing inside the company through, say, LinkedIn connections or by other means could make the difference—and clue you in to vital information about company culture. Since a big part of the interview's objective is to find fit between the candidate and the company's culture such information could prove to be critical.

Biography

Alex Freund

Alex Freund had a successful career as a corporate director at the headquarters of Fortune 500 companies. He graduated from Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration and managed some 35 different departments.

In his prior career, Alex had extensive experience interviewing people for jobs. Now, as a career coach, he specializes in preparing people for job interviews. In 2007, he formed Landing Expert Career Coaching services. He can be reached by email at alex@landingexpert.com or through his website http://www.landingexpert.com.

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